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# POSTING IN THE POCONOS



FOREST SERVICE  
U.S. Department of Agriculture

*Highlights of  
a 1976 cooperative study  
conducted by the  
University of Pennsylvania's  
Department of Landscape Architecture  
and Regional Planning  
and the  
USDA Forest Service*

## A sample of key study findings:

- Eight out of ten landowners post signs on their land.
- Most signs prohibit trespassing, with hunters the most frequent offenders.
- The longer a person owns land, the more likely he is to post.
- The larger the property, the greater the likelihood of posting.
- Landowners allow few people besides relatives and friends to use their land.
- At the root of a landowner's decision to post lie three main issues: the violation of property rights; government interference and land acquisition; and law enforcement.



**"Sign, sign, everywhere a sign."**

A songwriter in the 1960's used these lyrics to protest an over-abundance of posted notices. The same phrase could describe much of northeastern Pennsylvania, where the number of signs seems to increase as the area grows in popularity with recreationists.

Who posts most and why? This study of posting practices in Pike County, Pennsylvania, provides some answers to that question, one with important implications for recreational development in the Pocono Mountains and in similar areas.

Pike County is an area that typifies many of the region's problems. Forests, fields, streams, lakes, and mountains make the area a prime recreation attraction for millions of people living in nearby population centers of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. As travel becomes more expensive and people become increasingly interested in leisure pursuits, the pressure will grow on Pike County's convenient and abundant recreation facilities. Like other private landowners in the Poconos, most Pike County residents post their property.

Ask a Pike County resident what his sign is and instead of Aquarius or Libra the answer might be "no trespassing". To the casual observer, horoscopes are of less concern here than hunting and other activities that infringe on the private landowner's property rights.

Signs are everywhere in this mountain resort area. They warn against trespassing, mostly by hunters. But campers, gunners, fishermen, snowmobilers, and even berry pickers are also singled out. Some signs are made of metal; others are plastic, cardboard, or wood. And their condition varies as widely as their composition — from new and neat, to weathered, to riddled with buckshot.

Signs adorn buildings and embankments, line highways and streams, peep through cyclone fences, do a high wire act over swamps, and even hang across waterfalls. Neither field nor forest is spared, and in one case a public road appears private because of posting.

Places most frequently posted include:

- Forest land along a road, often every 10 to 20 feet.
- Land adjacent to roads with no through access.
- Land along a road bordering water.
- Private land adjacent to public land.

Places that usually escape posting include large open fields and public land. Posting also decreases near developments.



So a casual, visual survey of Pike County reveals at least two facts about people who post: they are plenteous and persistent. But what other attitudes and characteristics do they possess?

As part of the study, more than 200 private landowners were chosen at random and asked to answer questions that would help create a profile of posters.

One question asked property owners to tell how they use their land. Topping the list are private recreation (47 percent) and residence (45 percent). Next in line is "wilderness" with 33 percent. Twelve percent of the owners use their land for timber production, 8 percent allow commercial recreation, 7 percent raise crops, and only 3 percent maintain it for pasture or commercial-industrial use.

To help protect these uses, nearly 80 percent of the landowners post signs on their property. When people who post are classified according to how long they have owned property, a definite trend appears. The longer a person owns land, the more likely he is to post. Only 50 percent of people who have owned land for five years or less post signs; the percentage jumps to 90 among those who have been landowners for 15 years or more.



Landowners also seem to feel more protective of larger lots, up to a point. Among people owning less than 10 acres, 45 percent post their property. In the 100 to 500 acre group, 95 percent have installed signs. Posting drops off again slightly in the larger classes — to 85 percent in the 1000-or-more acre league.

What is the landowners' favorite target for posting? More than half name hunting as the activity they'd most like to discourage. Other top-runners in the unpopularity contest are gunning (32 percent, fishing (31 percent), snowmobiles and offroad vehicles (29 percent), and camping (27 percent). Making a strong showing, at 28 percent, is "everything."

In landowners' eyes, posting helps prevent a multitude of problems. Trespassing is foremost on their minds — 58 percent name this as their major headache. Next comes littering with 43 percent, followed by invasion of privacy and vandalism, with 36 and 34 percent, respectively. Unintentional damage concerns 18 percent of those questioned, noise is a problem for 16 percent, and 11 percent fear personal injury.

Most landowners trust relatives and friends to use their property, but virtually exclude the general public. Community members are acceptable guests to 14 percent; 9 percent would welcome business associates. An adamant minority, 7 percent would bar everyone from their land.

For reactions to be so strong, some equally strong beliefs must motivate Pike County's landowners. In open-ended interviews, these underlying concerns came quickly to the surface. Violation

of property rights, government interference and land acquisition, and law enforcement are the key issues that influence a land-owner's decision to post.

The best evidence of this attitude lies in the respondents' own words:

"People would run all over me if I didn't post; give 'em an inch and they take a mile."

"The government rips you off."

"One trespasser told me he paid \$40 for his hunting license and this entitled him to hunt on any land in the state, public or private."

"Landowners should decide for themselves whether or not they post their land. They own it and they pay taxes on it."

"The police force is too small. It doesn't have the power to arrest and prosecute posting violators."

"We have trouble with people fishing and swimming in our lakes; they must think the lakes are public."

"If the government doesn't stop interfering, someone is going to get shot."

Before it comes to a showdown at the O.K. Corral, there should be other ways to solve the paradox of the Poconos. The demands for outdoor recreation will probably continue to grow, and at the same time, private landowners — the keepers of prime recreation land — will probably continue to oppose this expansion. This study offers no easy solutions, but it may contribute to a better understanding of the problem.





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